

SPEAK UP

In December 2004, The Meridian Star asked, "If you could send a message to the troops in Iraq, what would it be?" Here's what these people said.

"My best friend, Troy Harper of Meridian, is currently at boot camp at Parris Island, S.C. He'll be shipped out on Jan. 14. He said he wants to go to Iraq to protect us all. He's just like a brother to me and I want to tell him to be safe and stay out of harm's way."

**Joey Boswell, student
Northeast High School**



Boswell

"We support you and we're proud of you. Be safe."

**Hollis Carroll, Chunky
City of Meridian employee**



Carroll

"I want them to know how proud of them I am and how thankful I am for them. I pray every night that God brings them home safely and they get back to their families."

**Mary McCullough, retired,
visiting family in Meridian**

"Thank you and God bless you. We're praying for you every day."

**Mary Woodall, Meridian
City employee**

"I'm proud of them and praying for them all the time."

**Stan Holloman,
Quitman**

"I appreciate your dedication. I admire what you're doing. I have a brother-in-law in the military who lives in California."

**Jerry Crowell, Meridian
City employee**



Crowell

"We're praying for you. God bless you and thank you."

**Cathy Corella, Meridian
Hairdresser**

"We appreciate the sacrifice and the effort. Hope you'll be home soon."

**Phil Sutphin, Decatur
President of East Central
Community College**



McKee

"We appreciate everything they are doing more than they know, especially this time of the year. I hope the Lord will be with them, protect them and give them strength."

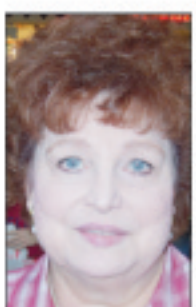
**Miletus McKee, Chunky
Homemaker**

"Thanks for everything you're doing to protect us."

**Tina Black, Philadelphia
Wal-Mart employee**

"We appreciate them, love them and pray for them. You're in our prayers every day. I'm 100 percent behind them. I care. Every time I see someone in the military, I just want to touch them and hug them. They are giving up so much for us."

**Nelda Bonner, retired
Choctaw County, Ala.**



Bonner

"I hope you all return home safely."

**Nell Corley, Bailey
Retired**

"We want to say hello from home and be safe to Richard Moss of Enterprise and William Altman of Quitman."

**Tabitha McGruber and
Tiffany McGruber,
Sam's Club employees**



Black

"I'll leaving in mid-February with the 926th Engineering Battalion stationed at Fort McClellan in Alabama. I want my family to know that I'll miss you."

**Spec. James Black,
Abbeville, Ala.**

A letter to 'Cuz' in Iraq

The Meridian High School student who wrote this letter in November insisted on remaining anonymous. It is to a cousin serving on the front lines in Fallujah, Iraq. While we wish the writer weren't so shy, in a way, his very anonymity makes his cousin our cousin, too.

Dear "Cuz,"

Tomorrow will be a week since you called the house. The connection lasted only a brief time, fewer than five minutes, and then it was lost.

You told my momma that you have been in the thick part of the Fallujah battle for the past two weeks. You sounded like you were tired, but you assured us that you were all right.

In the midst of a horrible onslaught that will not do anything to check the growth and power of terrorists, that has destroyed a countless number of lives, I hope that you will always be "all right." We can only wonder what that means since so much stuff is going on over there.

My momma said she was going to ask you what you all were going to eat for Thanksgiving Day. That seemed almost an obscene question to ask in the midst of what you were doing.

The questions that she should have been asking are, "What all have you seen?" "What all have you done — what all have you not done?" and "Has this experience changed your life?"

My parents and I are at home trying to go on with life, but that is very hard to do knowing that you're a very special loved one over there, and trouble could be right around the corner.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

ADDICTED TO THE NEWS

Many families with loved ones in Iraq say they have become addicted to cable news stations, always flipping through channels looking for reports from the Middle East. As the young man who wrote this story said: "We wake up every morning hoping you are OK. My momma wakes up turning on the television to make sure there is nothing wrong with you over there."

We wake up every morning hoping you are OK. My momma wakes up turning on the television to make sure there is nothing wrong with you over there.

I would like to tell you that we are very proud of you. I would have never thought that you would be the one over there in

Iraq. You have taught me that life is not always serious and, sometimes, we all have to play.

I want you to know never be afraid to be yourself. I still have dreams about you, Ted, Derrick and me in the park ...

— Your "Cuz" in Meridian